

# Re-adjusting the Kaleidoscope: The Basic Tenants of Invitational Theory and Practice

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## Abstract

Given the variance in the literature regarding definitions of terms and elements of Invitational Theory and Practice, this article proposes the adoption of a standard terminology for the foundational principles and elements unique to this theory. The major concepts are presented herein as an attempt to set the standardization for future use.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and discuss the basic tenants of Invitational Theory and Practice (ITP) in a way that becomes the accepted standard for use of the various concepts and terminologies used to describe and or explain ITP.

The intention is that this document be seen not as a rebuttal of the past descriptors and various explanations of ITP, but more as an attempt to make ITP's terminologies and descriptions of the fundamental precepts

more stable thus strengthening the theory for empirical research, decreasing confusion, reducing inconsistencies, and furthering its acceptance for the continued evolution and implementation of ITP in areas other than just education.

A review of ITP literature reveals the use of labels, phrases, wordings, definitions, and titles of the major ITP principles appearing in an inconsistent and oft times confusing or contradictory manner. We suggest that the core principles/elements/concepts be modified only to achieve greater standardization and specificity in definition, and reconfigured to achieve greater clarity. We propose that ITP begin to employ standard labels and definitions of its basic elements of the theory and use this terminology in a consistent manner.

Hopefully this modification and reconfiguration will promote a higher level of consistency, reliability, and measurability

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thus broadening the understanding of the foundational beliefs, attitudes, values, and authentic behaviors of the practitioner of ITP. In doing so, it is hypothesized that the result will be an increased acceptance of ITP as a valued theory of practice. (J. M. Novak & W. W. Purkey, personal communication, October 5, 2010). The term Invitational Theory is used here instead of Invitational Education as we hope to stimulate the growth and application of ITP in a broader sense specifically personal integration and its application in venues other than just education.

### **Basic Concepts of Invitational Theory**

Invitational Theory is a set of congruent suppositions about constructive human thinking and behavior that when applied across a multitude of human endeavors increases the probability for positive outcomes. Moreover, when applied reliably, consistently, and authentically, the positive human potential of those it impacts will significantly increase (Purkey & Novak, 2008, Purkey & Siegel, 2003, Shaw, 2004).

### **Foundations of Invitational Theory**

#### **Democratic Ethos**

Purkey and Novak described the democratic ethos best in “Fundamentals of Invitational Education” (2009). They state:

Democracy is a social ideal based on the conviction that all people matter and can grow through participation in self-governance. Invitational Education reflects this democratic ethos by emphasizing deliberative

dialogue, mutual respect, and the importance of shared activities. The goal of the inviting approach is to have people work together to construct the ethical character, social practices, and educational institutions that promote a fulfilling shared life. Implied here is a respect for people and their abilities to articulate their concerns as they act responsibly on issues that impact their lives. Deeply embedded in this respect for persons is a commitment to the ideal that people who are affected by decisions should have a say in formulating those decisions.

The ideal of democracy is based on a "doing with" as opposed to a "doing to" approach to relating to people. Being "done to" is to be seen as an underling or a vessel to be filled and to be demeaned of inherent dignity and imaginative potential. Being "done with" is to be seen as an active participant in a meaningful process. In addition, participating in democratic practices is vital because it is the deepest way to teach democratic values. Viewed this way, democracy is an educative process, a social way of coming together to enjoy, reflect, and act responsibly.

## Perceptual Tradition

ITP has as its foundation the tenants of a variety of congruent psychological and philosophical schools of thought. ITP literature refers to these as “The Perceptual Tradition”. The viewpoints of many writers, such as George Kelly, Gordon Allport, Sidney Jourard, Kurt Lewin, Abraham Maslow, Art Combs, Carl Rogers, and many others have been consolidated into a singular and congruent framework termed the perceptual tradition.

In essence the perceptual tradition postulates that all behavior, without exception, is completely determined by the perceptual field of the behaving organism. This means that how a person chooses to behave depends upon how they view the world and themselves in it. Each of us has our own reality built not only upon the present but our past experiences as well. Invitational Theory relies heavily upon this perspective for understanding self and others (Combs, Richards, and Richards, 1976, Jourard, 1971).

## Self-concept Theory

There are numerous self-concept theorists whose works have contributed to the development and evolution of ITP. Closely tied to the perceptual tradition, the learned beliefs that an individual holds true about themselves lies at the core of understanding human behavior. Of central importance is the view that the maintenance, protection, and enhancement of the perceived self are the basic motivations behind all human behavior. Thus, ITP strives to enhance the self-concepts of others, as one’s self-concept

drives behavior and thus significantly influences what one is capable of doing.

## The Four Basic Assumptions of ITP

ITP is founded on a set of beliefs about the inherent nature of individuals from an external viewpoint (Purkey, & Novak 1984).

1. People are able, valuable, and capable of self-direction, and should be treated accordingly.
2. Helping is a cooperative, collaborative alliance in which process is as important as product.
3. People possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development.
4. This potential can best be realized by places, policies, and programs that are intentionally designed to invite development, and by people who consistently seek to realize this potential in themselves and others, personally and professionally.

These four assumptions are based on variety of congruent psychological and philosophical schools of thought that emphasize the positive development of all individuals. These four basic assumptions are viewed as interdependent, thus forming a slightly larger more complex perspective of individual behaviors.

## Values

**Optimism.** Is a viewpoint individuals choose to take of the world and others based on the wish or hope for positive outcomes.

**Trust.** From the ITP perspective, the concept of trust is a multidimensional element that includes, thinking, behaving, and beliefs. It involves hope for the future and behaviors based on reliability, consistency, dependability, personal authenticity, and truthfulness.

**Respect.** Simply put it is a belief that people are valuable, able, responsible, and should be treated accordingly.

**Care.** Care is concern expressed warmly in the welfare for others.

**Intentionality.** Intentionality is the vehicle upon which the robust values of Optimism, Trust, Respect, and Care are propelled and applied. Intentionality is a belief, underlying behavior with a purposeful direction and aim.

### **Invitation**

An invitation is an intentional and caring act of communication, by which the sender seeks to enroll the receiver in the positive vision of the receiver set forth in the communication. It offers something beneficial for consideration.

### **Levels of Functioning (AKA The Ladder)**

The four hierarchical levels of human behavior that involve both the concepts of intentionality and invitations are as follows:

**Intentionally Disinviting.** This is the purposeful act of behaving in ways that seek to injure or disrupt the positive nature/potential of others or processes that impede beneficial outcomes.

**Unintentionally Disinviting.** This is the act of accidental or unplanned behaviors

that injure or disrupt the positive nature/potential of others or processes that impede beneficial outcomes.

**Unintentionally Inviting.** This is the accidental or unplanned act of behaving in ways that seek to enhance the positive nature/potential of others or processes that facilitate beneficial outcomes.

**Intentionally Inviting.** This is the purposeful act of behaving in ways that seek to enhance the positive nature/potential of others or processes that facilitate beneficial outcomes.

### **Application Processes (AKA Four Corner Press)**

Application process describe an invitational act purposely directed at oneself or others in the either the domain of one personal life or ones professional endeavors.

Being Personally Inviting With Oneself.

Being Personally Inviting With Others.

Being Professionally Inviting With Oneself.

Being Professionally Inviting With Others.

### **Domains (AKA The 5 P's)**

The areas of focus for inviting behavior are:

People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes.

### **Sending Choices**

In the process of invitational behavior it is acknowledged that individuals have choices regarding the sending or not sending invitations.

## Styles

The process of behaving invitingly or uninvitingly is describe in four distinct styles or manners. They are:

**Visibly Inappropriate.** This is the purposeful and overt act of being disinviting.

**Invisibly Inappropriate.** This is the purposeful and covert act of being disinviting.

**Visibly Appropriate.** This is the purposeful and overt act of being inviting.

**Invisibly Appropriate.** This is the purposeful and covert act of being inviting.

## Accepting Choices

Invitational theory acknowledges that individuals have choices regarding the accepting or not accepting invitations.

## Outcomes

Inviting or disinviting behaviors have two potential outcomes respectively termed, a beneficial presence or lethal presence.

## Plus Factor

At its best, invitational theory becomes “invisible” because it becomes a means of addressing humanity. When one has developed the ability to be skillfully inviting even in the most difficult of situations, this is termed, the plus factor.

## The Inviting Stance

The phrase, “Inviting Stance” is used to describe a way of thinking and behaving that results in positive outcomes. Assuming this stance involves several levels of thinking

and behaving with self and others. The first is the understanding of the foundations of ITP. Specifically, Democratic Ethos, Perceptual Tradition, and Self-concept Theory. The second is the acceptance of the four basic assumptions. Third is the authentic, reliable and consistent use of the five values, optimism, trust, respect, care, and intentionality. Lastly, the stance is operationalized by individuals being intentionally inviting.

## The Helix

As illustrated in Figure 1, “The Helix” is a graphical way to show the developmental aspect of the adoption and application of ITP (Purkey and Novak 2008). Initially with occasional one spirals upward to a fuller understanding of ITP with a more systematic application.

## Conclusion

Invitational Theory is a useful and powerful tool to understand and positively shape the lives of others. Having a standardization of ITP’s basic terms and concepts is essential for the long-term growth and acceptance of this theory. We hope that those who adopt this theory also choose to accept the standardized terminology and definitions of outline heretofore in their practice, writing, and research concerning Invitational Theory. In an attempt to visually illustrate the process, concept and terms of ITP we refer the reader to Figure 2.

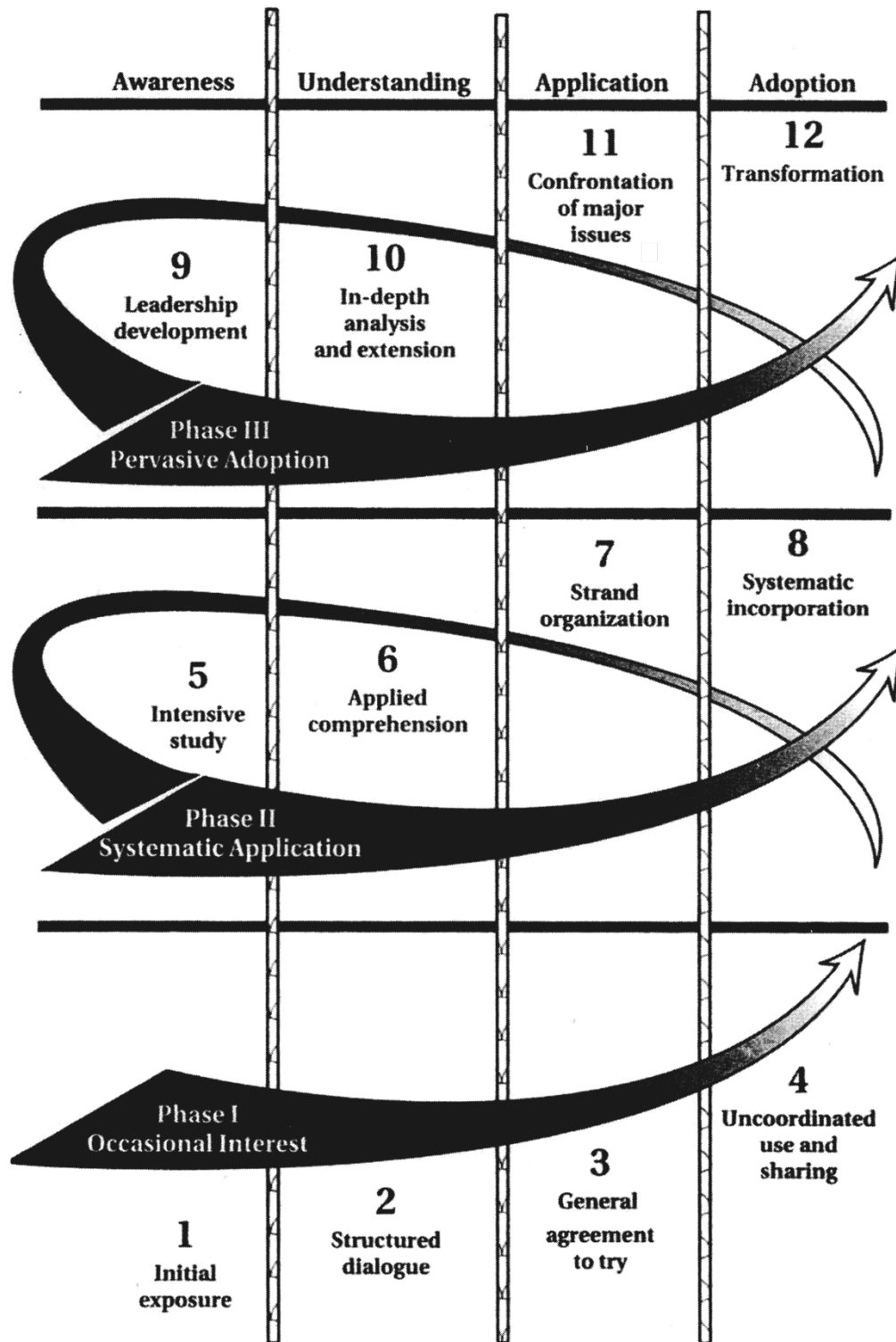
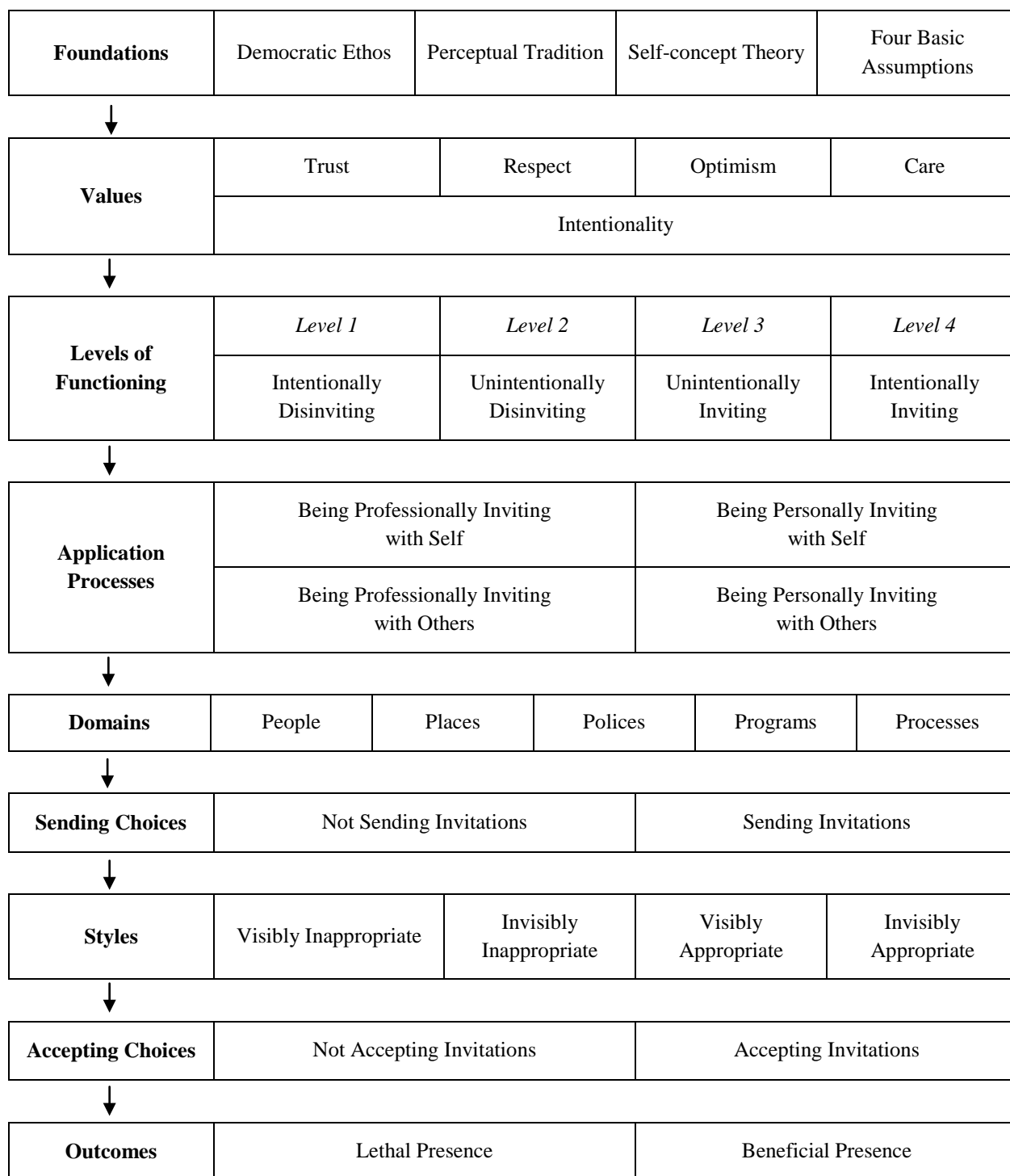


Figure 2 The Helix



*Figure 2 The Model of Invitational Theory and Practice* This diagram illustrates the Model of the Invitational Theory and Practice. It begins with identifying the foundations of Invitational Theory and proceeds stepwise through the various elements that culminate in the stated outcomes.

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